

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

PIF Resource Information Sheet

This information sheet is designed to provide the Virginia Department of Historic Resources with the necessary data to be able to evaluate the significance of the district for possible listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. This is not a formal nomination, but a necessary step in determining whether or not the district could be considered eligible for listing. Please take the time to fill in as many fields as possible. A greater number of completed fields will result in a more timely and accurate assessment. Staff assistance is available to answer any questions you have in regards to this form.

General Property Information		For Staff Use Only DHR ID #:	
District Name(s):	South Rockfish Rural Historic District		
District or Selected Building Date(s):	1739-1941	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circa <input type="checkbox"/> Pre <input type="checkbox"/> Post	Open to the Public? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Main District Streets and/or Routes:	Crossroads of Rockfish Hwy. (Route 151), and Beech Grove Road (Route 664).	City: Wintergreen	Zip: 22958 22967
County or Ind. City:	Nelson County	USGS Quad(s): Sherando, Greenfield, and Horseshoe Mountain.	

Physical Character of General Surroundings

Acreage: 1,500 ^{aprox.} Setting (choose one): ☐City ☐Urban ☐Town ☐Suburban ☒Rural ☐Transportation Corridor

Site Description Notes/Notable Landscape Features/Streetscapes

The South Rockfish River Valley is located along the Blue Ridge Mountains in Nelson County, fifteen miles northwest of Lovingsston, the county seat. The proposed district features historic residences, outbuildings, agricultural fields, and forest that perpetuate patterns of settlement and land use with antecedents dating to the mid-eighteen century. The valley's rugged setting contributed to the evolution of a unique sense of place. The district landscape revolves around a verdant plain cut from the steeply sloped peaks of the Blue Ridge Mountains by the south fork of the Rockfish River. The historic resources and landscape patterns retain a good degree of integrity to the proposed period of significance.

The proposed district is traversed by the Rockfish Valley Highway (R. 151) and Beech Grove Road (Rt. 664), both, Virginia scenic byways. These historic roads pass through a landscape that was shaped by the clash of two planter cultures—the Scotch-Irish and Anglicans, who left a legacy of diverse farming practices, architecture, and local craft. The steep, narrow valleys and wider floodplains carved by the south fork of the Rockfish River are therefore protected view sheds by the Virginia Scenic Byway program.

The headwaters of the South Fork Rockfish River form along the upper slopes of the eastern face of the Blue Ridge Mountains and Wintergreen Resort. Various streams empty into the South Fork—Little, Reids, Spruce, Stony, and Allen Creeks—as it flows northeast through the broad, relatively level and fertile valley. Gaps in the mountains frame the valley to the north and south, while prominent ridges—Three Ridge Mountain, Devil's Knob, Black Rock Mountain, Grassy Ridge, Crawford's Knob, and Horseshoe Mountain—edge the valley, providing a series of recognizable landmarks. On the south end of the Valley, one such gap, known as Verdiman's Pass in the 1750s, skirted Three Ridge Mountain and connected the Rockfish River valley on the north with the Tye River valley on the south. Reed's Gap lay at the crest of the Blue Ridge above Reeds Creek, connecting Rockfish Valley with the Shenandoah.

The village of Nellysford falls within the proposed district and serves as the center of community life. It is situated along the south fork of the Rockfish River at the crossroads of Rockfish Valley Highway (Rt. 151), and Adial Road (Rt. 634). The south fork of the Rockfish River roughly forms the eastern boundary of the district, while the other boundaries follow the property lines of contributing parcels included in the district. Areas of non-historic development on the boundaries have been omitted, including residential development around the Stoney Creek Golf Course in Nellysford.

Ownership
Categories:

☒ Private

☐ Public-Local

☐ Public-State

☐ Public-Federal

General District Information

What were the historical uses of the resources within the proposed district? Examples include: Dwelling, Store, Barn, etc...

DOMESTIC: single dwelling/mansion, residence; Secondary Structure/dairy, smokehouse, storage pit, storage shed, kitchen.

COMMERCE/TRADE: business/office building; specialty store/blacksmith shop, country store

EDUCATION Schoolhouse

RELIGION: Religious Facility/church

FUNERARY: Cemetery/cemetery

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: Processing/smokehouse, tobacco barn; Storage/tobacco warehouse; Agricultural field/pasture, vineyard, orchard; Agricultural Outbuilding/ barn.

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: Manufacturing facility/mill; Industrial storage/warehouse

LANDSCAPE: Garden; Forest; Unoccupied Land/meadow; Natural Feature/mountain, valley, river

TRANSPORTATION: Road-Related/highway

What are the current uses? (if other than the historical use)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling/mansion, residence; Multiple Dwelling/duplex Secondary Structure/dairy, smokehouse, storage pit, storage shed, kitchen, garage; Hotel/Bed & Breakfast

COMMERCE/TRADE: business/office building;

Professional/office; Financial Institution/bank; Specialty store/bakery, clothing store, hardware store; Department Store/general store, marketplace; Restaurant/café, bar;

Warehouse/warehouse, commercial storage

GOVERNMENT: Post Office;

RELIGION: Religious Facility/church

FUNERARY: Cemetery/cemetery

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Outdoor Recreation/park, hiking trail; Monument/Marker/commemorative marker; Work of Art/sculpture

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE: Processing/brewery, winery; Storage/wine cellar; Agricultural field/pasture, vineyard, orchard; Animal Facility/chicken coop; Agricultural Outbuilding/ barn.

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: Industrial storage/warehouse

LANDSCAPE: Parking Lot; Park; Garden; Forest; Unoccupied Land/meadow; Natural Feature/mountain, valley, river;

Conservation Area/ecological habitat

TRANSPORTATION: Road-Related/highway; Pedestrian-Related/trail

VACANT/NOT IN USE

Architectural styles or elements of buildings within the proposed district:

NO STYLE

COLONIAL: Georgian

EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal

MID-19TH CENTURY: Greek Revival

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Classical Revival/Neo-Classical Revival

LATE 19TH AND EARLY CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style, Bungalow/Craftsman

MIXED

Architects, builders, or original owners of buildings within the proposed district:

William H. Crawford, Hawes Coleman, Milton LaTour Grigg,

Are there any known threats to this district?

Residential subdivision developments. Changing land use patterns of open space.

General Description of District: (Please describe building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district and a general setting and/or streetscape description.)

Architecturally, the area is significant for both its farmhouses and agricultural outbuildings, which are an important legacy to Nelson County's architectural history. The area is an excellent example of the neoclassical style in Nelson County, and contains some of the earliest agricultural outbuildings in the county, dating from the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

The majority of early South Rockfish River Valley buildings were small one-room structures. Today, only Fork Farm (c. 1740) remains as a remarkable example of eighteenth century vernacular architecture. Although the valley was becoming populated, there were few communities as such before 1800. Early settlement of the area was limited, with known buildings that included a few small log residences, and some mills. Trading ties and immigration with areas west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Shenandoah Valley, brought Nelson County residents in contact with the Scots-Irish and German artisans who demonstrated willingness to experiment with form and style. Their use of graining and spongework as decorative treatments found its way into many South Rockfish River Valley homes. Few of these early dwellings remain, generally, the larger, more sophisticated, and more stable examples of early South Rockfish River Valley construction are what have survived.

During the eighteenth century, the Scotch-Irish Cohees' primary means for maintaining a sense of community and cultural cohesion was through worship. By 1740, they had built a meetinghouse near the current-day juncture of Routes 6 and 151. This building was not referred to as a church in order to avoid interference from the English Crown as Presbyterian worship was outlawed at that time. Today, a Presbyterian Church built in 1853 stands on the site of the original church, and a roadside historical marker tells the story of the early meetinghouse.

While living in a somewhat isolated region, South Rockfish River Valley residents were aware of architectural styles and trends. The trading, kinship, and friendship patterns of the major landowners brought in a variety of concepts that may not ordinarily be associated with an area of mountains and valleys. However, the majority of antebellum buildings in Nelson County demonstrate little evidence of high-style ornamentation. Of those that do, most feature the Federal style with several fine examples. Early local builders and contractors preferred the late-Georgian style, which persisted into the early nineteenth century. The survival of houses within those two earlier styles and their relatively unaltered state may be the result of the agrarian nature of South Rockfish River Valley and its reluctance, or inability because of expense, to change. South Rockfish River Valley has also largely escaped the growth pressure experienced in other areas. Subsequent styles have less impact in the area because major construction had already occurred.

The majority of historic farms sit atop bluffs overlooking bottomlands. The historic farms overlook the bottomland and the Rockfish River on the south. On the other side, they face north towards Crawford's Knob, Devil's Knob, Black Rock Mountain, and Three Ridge Mountain. There are nine manor houses, located within a mile of each other, that were built near the south fork of the Rockfish River between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Still standing today are: Three Chimneys and Crawford House (both c. 1750), River Bluff (c. 1779), Winter Green (c. 1789), Elk Hill and Glen Thorn (c. 1800), and High View, now called Mill Hill (c. 1834). Vallemont (c. 1850) and Glen Mary (c. 1840) have been lost to demolition or neglect. All of these estates were working farms. Glen Thorn and Elk Hill continue to serve as active farms. The Wintergreen Winery is on land that was a part of the original High View property. South Rockfish River Valley manor houses have evolved from a late-eighteenth century structure through additions and renovations. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, successive generations made significant alterations and additions, reflecting changing tastes and architectural fashions as well as the rising prosperity of the South Rockfish. By far the most common post-bellum house design in the area is the I-house with a single-pile, two-story, and center-hall plan dwelling. This type of house often has a one or two-story rear ell.

By the nineteenth century, the village of Wintergreen was the center commercially and socially for the surrounding farm community. A surprisingly large number of buildings occupied the relatively small area comprising the village of Wintergreen. Currently standing on this land are Wintergreen house, Wintergreen Christian Church, and the former Wintergreen Country Store. Now vanished from the property were a post office/home, Wintergreen Pentecostal Holiness Church, and several large tobacco barns. Many buildings once stood near the Wintergreen intersection, west of the village. Today only Elk Hill Baptist Church survives from that cluster, but vanished buildings include a corn mill; saw mill, store, blacksmith shop, foundry, wheelwright shop, and several houses. Built later, but now also gone, were two schools, at least five general stores, a liquor distillery, and warehouses. During the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, country stores served as social and commercial centers within the small communities of the South Rockfish River Valley, and provided the commercial backbone of the local farm community. Today, the Wintergreen Country Store (c. 1903) survives at the intersection of Route 151 and 627. The building has served as a post office, voting precinct, local bar, and store. The Wintergreen Store is the only remaining example of a succession of stores that once served the Wintergreen area.

During the first portion of the twentieth century, the villages of Nellysford and Beech Grove increased significantly in population, and thus, in new house construction. Although many of these twentieth century houses featured irregular floor plans and vernacular styles, two styles of houses were commonly constructed in the county in the period before World War II. The bungalow, a popular national style of the early twentieth century, is represented in each of those villages. Bungalow-Craftsman influenced designs include both eaves-front and dormer houses and central hall, gable front houses. The second common twentieth century house style is the American Four-Square. They are square in plan and generally two stories with a hipped roof.

Significance Statement: Briefly note any significant events, personages, and/or families associated with the proposed district. It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or genealogies to this form. Please list all sources of information. Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

The South Rockfish River Valley is significant in the areas of agriculture and architecture as an outstanding collection of working farms that have evolved and prospered for over 260 years, reflecting changing trends and practices in agriculture. Some of the earliest farms in Nelson County are located here in South Rockfish River Valley. The area has served continuously as farmland, witnessing the rise and decline of both tobacco and apple farming in the county, as well as recent experiments with grape growing. The region prospered as an agricultural community because of its location along the South Fork of the Rockfish River, which opens into the James River, a historically significant shipping route for Virginia. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the area grew substantially when apple agriculture became a successful crop.

The Scot speculator John Chiswell had acquired large patents in old Albemarle reported to be some 40,000 acres, including 30,000 acres on Rockfish River by 1739 and another 10,000 acres patented in 1749, "in three surveys lying between the lines of George Braxton, John Rucker, Parson Rose, and the Fluvanna..." A 2360 acres patent of 1739 coincides with the proposed historic district. Chiswell had begun to sell land in the 1740's to the Cohee settlers in Rockfish Valley and in 1760, sold 20,000 acres to his powerful son-in-law, John Robinson, Treasurer of the colony and Speaker of the House. Apparently, John Chiswell went broke and his land was re-patented to Thomas Morrison. Morrison's widow Rachael Ayers was the only woman to own property in her name in Nelson (then Amherst County) before the Revolutionary War. The Fry-Jefferson map calls South Rockfish as Morrison's Branch.

Over time, settlers arrived in the valley from Tidewater Virginia and other points east. Many of these were slave-owning Anglican tobacco farmers referred to as Tuckahoes. The rich soils of the valley were particularly well suited to growing dark leaf tobacco used for cigar wrappings that commanded a good price. Hogsheads of local tobacco were rolled, or were placed in wagons and driven, to bateaux on the Rockfish and James rivers where they were floated to Richmond for sale or export. Local planters of means began to build larger and more stately homes. As tobacco prices declined in the nineteenth century, local farmers began to diversify their agricultural base. A variety of livestock were raised by local farmers; until fencing laws were passed in the 1870s, these animals roamed freely to graze. By the Civil War, apples became a significant farm product in Nelson County. Historic records indicate the continued presence of saw and corn/grist mills. At Elk Hill, a stream referred to as Still House Branch suggests that whiskey was also being produced from local grain. Some local houses from this period incorporate brick into their construction, a portion of which was likely produced locally.

Morrison's heirs sold to the Reid family, and finally the Colemans acquired a large part of the original tract. Alexander Reid and his son, Samuel Reid, settled South Rockfish in the mid-18th century. The first crops grown by the Reids are unknown. In 1805, Hawes Coleman, the first of a long line of Coleman owners, bought the property, cultivated tobacco, and built a tobacco-packing barn. South Rockfish prospered as a successful tobacco area. As tobacco production began to decline, Nelson County became known for its apples. The apple industry was particularly significant in Virginia in the 1880s and helped to generate prosperity in the Rockfish Valley following the Civil War. After apple production at South Rockfish began to decline in 1941, farmers removed the apple trees, raised cattle, and grew hay.

Hawes Nicholas Coleman was one of the wealthiest men of his time in Nelson County. By 1860, he had 125 slaves and owned a gristmill, but no one knows of its location today. He operated the gristmill turning wheat into flour and chop at a value of \$4,800 and \$375, and corn into meal valued at \$6,500.22. He grew tobacco but also practiced traditional intensification, which meant that he created permanent fields based around one or two less risky crops. It was Dr. Coleman that introduced apples to the area, planting 10,000 Albemarle Pippin apple trees. Apples became very popular and Coleman became one of the biggest growers in Nelson County. The Coleman's agricultural production had significantly increased over the years, tobacco on the farm almost doubled while swine production remained strong. Dr. Coleman died in 1877. In the year of his death, it was recorded that his wife Nannie A. Watson Coleman shipped 500 barrels of choice Albemarle Pippins from the Elk Hill Orchards to R. W. Woodruff Co. apple brokers in New York City, New York. Shipments as large as that one were also made before that.

Diversified farming remained the primary land use activity of the valley during the twentieth century. Local residents worked to enhance the sustainability of their farmland, and continued to diversify their offerings in farm products. Today, the valley community remains fiercely independent, self-reliant, and dedicated to stewardship of the land. Many landowners have put their land in conservation easement, which will protect the South Rockfish River Valley natural habitats and rural character in the future. Thus, these land-sense qualities may be traced to the cultural history of the valley.

Although most of the settlers in the old Amherst and the Rockfish Valley did not form villages or town, a few concentrations or settlements appeared in the early years. The Presbyterian settlers, sharing the same culture and religion, were brought together as both a local settlement and a community of believers. Those of a similar social class intermarried with one another, and with nearby planters. Most of the men of the proper age became soldiers in the Revolution, and prominent families such as the Reids and Crawfords produced the early justices of old Amherst. William Harris Crawford was born in Nellysford in 1772. Early in life, he was taken to Georgia and became a leading politician of the era. He was United States Senator; Minister to France; Secretary of War and of the Treasury; candidate, 1824, for the Presidency, which was decided by the House of Representatives. His house remains at the foot of Blue Ridge, overlooking Nellysford and the Rockfish River Valley.

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)Mr. ☒ Mrs. ☐
Ms. ☐ Miss ☐Rockfish Valley Foundation
by Peter Agelasto III, President

P.O. Box 235

Nellysford

VA

22958

(Address)

(City)

(State)

(Zip Code)

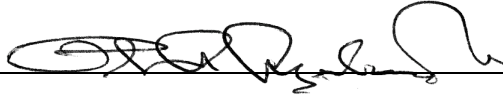
peter.agelasto@gmail.com

434-361-2251

(Email Address)

(Daytime telephone including area code)

Applicant's Signature:



Date: October 28, 2009

Notification

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for the department to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator or City Manager.

Mr. ☒ Mrs. ☐ Dr. ☐
Miss ☐ Ms. ☐ Hon. ☐

Stephen A. Carter

County Administrator

(Name)

(Position)

Nelson County

84 Courthouse Square P.O. Box 336

(Locality)

(Address)

Lovingston

VA

22949

434-263-7000

(City)

(State)

(Zip Code)

(Daytime telephone including area code)

Please use the following space to explain why you are seeking an evaluation of this district.

The South Rockfish has retained much of its historic character and physical integrity due to a long history and continuum of farming coupled with a cohesive and identifiable geography. The historic district designation can be a valuable tool for the community to support tourism, encourage land stewardship, achieve economic development, and preserve the rural character of the South Rockfish area. This will raise consciousness about the value of open space and agricultural uses.

Would you be interested in the State and/or the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes ☒ No ☐Would you be interested in the easement program? Yes ☒ No ☐